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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004907

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SMALLER "ISLAMIC COALITION" WAGES A TOUGH CAMPAIGN
AGAINST THE SHIA ALLIANCE GIANT

Classified By: Classified by Robert S. Ford, for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Several leaders from the "Islamic Coalition," list 549, cast their slate as an embattled competitor of the dominant United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) in a December 4 meeting with Poloffs. The group, made up of breakaways from the Shia coalition led by the Islamic Action Organization, draws its legitimacy from two key Shia clerics and a number of prominent religious families. The Islamic Coalition has cast itself as an honest alternative to what it says is an Iranian-funded and undemocratic United Iraqi Alliance. They are pushing a detailed campaign with specific proposals on economic programs, service improvements, and land reform. Their platform calls for withdrawal of "non-Iraqi" forces from "secured cities." They expressed admiration for U.S. values, which they said were identical to Shia values, and hoped for a strong relationship after the elections. END SUMMARY.

The Ticket

2. (C) Leaders of the Islamic Coalition, running as slate number 549, provided Poloffs an overview of their ticket and their goals in a December 4 meeting. The Islamic Coalition is an umbrella group bringing together several small Shia Islamist groups who broke with the UIA after running with them in the January elections. Strongest in Karbala, Najaf, Samawa, and Diwaniyya, the group's symbol is a sailboat, and its slogan casts it as "The Life Boat." The following are the key groups running on the slate:

- Islamic Action Organization
- Faiili Islamic Gathering in Iraq
- Religious Commonwealth in Iraq
- Islamic Commonwealth for Iraqi Students
- Hussaini Cultural Organizations Union
- Rafah and Freedom Movement

3. (C) The slate's real weight comes from its endorsement by leading religious figures and families. The Islamic Action Organization is backed by Ayatollah Muham Taqi al-Mударisi. The Rafah and Freedom Movement follows the legacy of Sadiq Shirazi, a Hawza student and son of the great cleric Muhammad Shirazi. Independent Shia Islamist Dr. Muhsin al-Qazwini, currently a TNA member, also leads the list and lends the venerated Qazwini family name to the ticket.

The Platform

4. (C) The members emphasized several key points in laying out their platform to Poloffs:

- PRACTICAL GOALS: The group passed over campaign literature that laid out a series of electoral goals far more practical than most of the platforms being promoted by other lists. One flyer said the party aimed to provide farmers land ownership, improve pension salaries, distribute land to citizens, provide grants to university students, and increase real estate loans. A thicker packet went so far as to recommend specific plans for better parking garages and picnicking areas for Iraqi citizens.

- NO IRANIAN FUNDING: The leaders contrasted themselves with the UIA list, which they said was Iranian-backed. They insisted that all of their funding is Iraqi. They also asserted that they were independent from Iranian policies and interests.

- UNDER PRESSURE FROM UIA: They said that the UIA list saw them as a dangerous rival and that UIA members are putting major pressure on their coalition. Islamic Action Organization Spokesman Jawad al-Attar claimed that posters had been torn down. He also said UIA leaders were warning that failing to vote for their slate would cause the Shia to lose the prime ministership. "They are hunting us more than Allawi," he said. "They are trying to marginalize us. But no one can

monopolize Islam." Attar said that he feared serious fraud on Election Day and urged the deployment of international observers, not just local ones.

- "NON-IRAQI" FORCES AND SECURED CITIES: The list's platform calls for legislation that would set a schedule for the withdrawal of "non-Iraqi" forces from "secured" cities. The platform does not call for a withdrawal of foreign forces from the country.

- READY FOR STRONG RELATIONS WITH U.S.: All of the men emphasized their respect for the U.S. and interest in establishing a strong relationship after the elections. Islamic Action Organization Secretary General Ibrahim al-Mutairi went so far as to insist that the tolerance and respect for human rights championed by the U.S. made America a proponent of Shia Islam. "You believe in Shia Islam!" he said. To prove his point, he quoted a famous comment made by Islamic scholar Ayatollah Jamal al-Din al-Afghani upon his return from the West. Afghani is said to have remarked, "I went to the West and found Islam but no Muslims. I went to the East and found Muslims but no Islam."

COMMENT: Post Election Plans

15. (C) The Islamic Coalition appears poised to pick up a few seats in Karbala and Najaf, but it could falter under recent calls for Shia to consolidate their vote. The leaders of the group said they had made no decisions on with whom they would ally after the elections, but they clearly distanced themselves from former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. They cast him and those who claim to be secularists in Iraq as anti-religious. Poloff, citing the United States as an example, noted that secular regimes are not by definition anti-religious. In fact they may assure equitable treatment and opportunities for all religions. For all their criticism of the UIA list, the leaders appeared ready to ally with it after the vote in order to form a government with an Islamist bent. Qazwini, who served on the constitution committee, said he approved of the document in the end but regretted that it failed to establish a "Council of Islamic Jurists" to act as monitors of the government.

KHALILZAD